From Jail to Sloppy Joe's: First Day's Progress of IFS As One and Only Yanqui Newsman in Castroland

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Not Easy to Be A Reporter-*At Large*-In Havana

"It's a long time since I've made out a ticket to Havana," said the girl at the airline ticket counter in Washington. On the plane for New Orleans, when it looked as if we were going to be late, I explained to the stewardess that I was anxious to make the connection for Mexico City because I had to catch a plane for Cuba next day. "Going to *Cuba*?" the stewardess repeated incredulously. After dinner she came back and asked, "Aren't you afraid?" In New Orleans the Mexico City connection had left and several of us were routed through Houston. When a mink clad fellow traveler—if she will pardon the phrase—heard I was going on to Havana, she screamed with surprise. "You going to Cuba? I didn't know anybody went there anymore." I began to feel as if I were headed for the moon.

Poor Prelude to A Peace Mission

The day before I left Washington, Mr. Kennedy at press conference had announced he would soon be imposing new restrictions on other nations' shipping to Cuba. On the way to the airport, I read an editorial in the *Washington Daily News* saying "failure of the Soviet Union to live up to its agreement with Cuba is on the whole a good break for the United States" because otherwise "President Kennedy's rather vague promises against invasion might have proved embarrassing." These seemed a poor prelude to a mission of peace, even by one well-meaning Yankee journalist, slightly overweight, travelling to an island neighbor on which his government's blockade was imposing hunger. With three boxes of weight-reducing Metrecal wafer in my capacious brief-case, in the happy expectation that a visit to Cuba should be a chance to get a little fat off, I felt like a repugnant symbol of the gap between have and have-not in today's world, the uncomfortably obese on one side, the desperately ill-fed on the other, confronting each other in an incomprehension far deeper than any difference over the nature of God or the sanctity of property.

In Mexico City, there was the same sensation of travelling to a land cut off, besieged, rendered unfamiliar. The taxi driver, on our way in from the airport, assured me when asked how people there felt about Castro that they were good Catholics, implying that as such they were naturally hostile to all sons of Satan. The well-stocked bookstores of the Mexican metropolis, two years ago full of works about and by Castro, were now swept clean of such literature. The only place I encountered sympathy for Cuba was in a Mexico City pharmacy. I had with me a list of medicines urgently needed in Havana and I had decided to buy what I could in Mexico. When I explained my purpose, I was given warm and friendly attention, helped with my selections and offered a 10 percent discount on my $100 in purchases. I took the discount in extra medical supplies. "Those poor people," said the clerk in Spanish, of the Cubans, as she wrapped my package in holiday gift paper.

As Cuba Sees It

"While Cuba allows the relatives of the invaders who caused great damage to leave, the U.S. does not let its own citizens travel to our country, even for a few days —such as happened with the students who found it impossible to come and see with their own eyes the truth about the revolution."

—Hoy, Havana, Dec. 27.

At the airport next day, it was clear that the Mexican government did not look on visits to Cuba with any such sentimental eye. As we cleared the last immigration barrier, every visitor leaving for Cuba was photographed, close up, by a police photographer. Then a long wait began. First the Cubana Airline plane was late in arriving and then it was late in leaving. A rumor spread that an incoming American on board had been arrested by the Cubans, forbidden permission to land, and ordered back to Cuba. Then it turned out that the Mexican government, which is trying to make travel to Cuba as difficult as possible for North Americans, was refusing to let two Canadians and an American get off the plane because they lacked transit visas. Fortunately the American was married to a Belgian woman. Among the Havana-bound passengers waiting (mostly diplomats) was the Belgian Ambassador. He finally loosened the noose of hostile Mexican regulations and obtained permission for the American and the Canadians to land in transit and thus release our plane for the return flight.

We set off at last, elated but hungry, all of us wondering whether the Cuban starvation rations we had read about would begin on the trip. But our fears proved unfounded, and Cubana Air Lines served us an excellent dinner. There was even a chess set on board with which I and a Dutch business man were able to make the flight of almost four hours pass swiftly. But the ordeal of entry into the strange new world of Cuba was not yet over. We landed a little after midnight, and the familiar airport seemed less festive than on earlier occasions. There was no band to serenade us. The only banner in evidence said, "We are thankful for the fraternal aid of the Socialist countries." It was soon evident that this gratitude did not extend to visiting U.S. journalists. We all passed the health officer quickly and together, but every time I moved up to the immigration barrier I was waved back while others were cleared through. The immigration officer in charge had a lean and hungry look, like Cassius. I could

(Continued on Page Two)

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not catch his eye and I had a vague feeling that I was going to have trouble.

Nothing Ever Lost Under The Revolution!

Everybody else had been cleared through. The airport was empty of all but officials and porters when my case was finally taken up. My money was changed, down to the last penny at the official peso-for-dollar rate. My bags were gone through carefully and the medicines I had brought were taken from me. I protested that they were urgently needed and showed a letter from the Medical Aid for Cuba Committee giving me, at my request, a list of the medicines most in short supply and the name of a doctor at a Havana hospital to contact on my arrival. I said I was afraid they might be lost around the airport. An angry young militant shouted furiously at me that under the Revolution nothing was lost! I was tired and cross and rather relished the idea of a good fight and shouted back at him not to give me that line of hooey, or words to that effect. The militant thereupon insisted that I be given a receipt, item for item, and a customs ticket with which the hospital could retrieve the medicines.* But I had clearly marked myself in his Jacobinical eye as a counter revolutionary element. While he looked on glaring, another agent started through a zipper portfolio I was carrying. When I assured him there was nothing in it but "periodicos" (papers and magazines), he ruled that these could not enter Cuba but must be left at the airport where I could pick them up on leaving. I pulled out a recent issue of *The New Yorker* in protest to show him I was not carrying dangerous literature, though I afterwards thought nothing could be more subversive to morale under the austerities of socialism than those glittering ads it carried. I don't know how the argument would have ended if the immigration officer I had identified in my mind as "Cassius" had not interrupted to tell me that I would have to go with him to the immigration office in Havana for questioning. Two militiamen with him picked up the portfolio along with my two other bags and hustled me out to a car waiting in the darkness outside.

So at two in the morning, I started off for Havana in an automobile with two militiamen and the immigration officer, none of whom could—or would—speak English. When I tried to find out what was up, they would shout "habla espanol" as if the mere attempt to speak in English was an affront to Cuba's newly found nationalist dignity. My papers were in order. I had a U.S. passport cleared for travel to Cuba and I had a visa issued by the Cubans through the Czech Embassy in Washington. Apparently these documents merely demonstrated how clever imperialist agents could be. We seemed to be short of gas and kept stopping along the darkened roads at gas stations only to find them closed. I had a vision of us running out of gas and of making the long march into Havana with my captors and my bags on foot. But luckily we found a gas station open, filled our tank and reached a police station on a narrow street in the old city of Havana. There my captors were greeted with warm revolutionary *abrazos*, and no doubt felicitated on their fine catch. They disappeared into a combination police dormitory and jail in the rear of the station. I found myself with two new guards. They refused to let me phone the hotel at which I was supposed to have reservations and told me I was being held incommunicado to await the arrival of an immigration officer in the morning. I refused to go to sleep on a cot set up for me in the rear just outside the jail cells and spent the rest of the night alternately dozing in a chair and roaming around the police station.

Trotzky's Books in The Jail Library

It was dingy and it smelled like police stations do all over the world. It differed only in its pictures and in its books. The pictures on the wall were those of José Marti and of Camille Cienfuegos, the latter a *barbudo* of Christ-like beauty, one of the early heroes and martyrs of the Revolution. The only picture of Fidel Castro was one torn out of a newspaper and pinned to the bulletin board along with an article about Maceo, the Negro General who was one of the leaders in the revolt against Spain. On the blackboard was written an invitation to comrades of the police to attend the wedding of one of them. The tattered volumes on the bookshelves were unlike those to be found in the police stations of any other country in the world. There was Plato's Republic and, of course, Don Quixote. There was a two volume history of the Platt Amendment we imposed on Cuba after the war with Spain. There was Liu Shao Chi's "How to Be A Good Communist" and Lenin's "Bankruptcy of the Second International." There was Trotsky's famous attack on Stalinism, "Their Morals and Ours." There was also his "Permanent Revolution" and his "Last Testament of Lenin." There were several examples of the inexpensive Marxist books the Soviet Union exports in large quantities like Kostantinov's "Fundamentals of Marxist Philosophy" and there were large stacks of back numbers of the Peking Review.

I was poorly guarded and could have run away if I had known where I was. But this would have meant leaving my bags behind and risking a shot from the pistols of my guards. In any case, it was much too interesting an experience to run away from. Of the two guards, both young, the one in charge was as implacable as the well-bred revolutionist should be when dealing with a counter revolutionary suspect; my repeated efforts to argue him into making a phone call were of no avail. His assistant, who seemed to be studying an introductory book on aeronautical engineering during the night,

*** A doctor from the hospital picked up the receipt from me two days later and went to the airport where he was given forms to fill out and told to return next day. I never did find out for sure whether the medicines got through.**

Canada's Largest Newspaper Proposes Mediation of the US-Cuban Quarrel

"It is time that the Cuban situation was reviewed in the light of cold common sense. The island has been denuded of the Russian missiles. Russian technicians have departed by the thousands. The Bay of Pigs prisoners have been ransomed and returned to the Unuited States.

"It is therefore annoying to find Mr. Michael Artime, political leader of the abortive 1961 Cuban invasion, calling for the Organization of American States to take military action to overthrow the Castro regime. We trust that Mr. Artime's U.S. hosts will make it officially clear that no invasion of Cuba from U.S. shores will be permitted. The U.S. has a duty to the world to keep its unruly guests in order.

"It should do more than that. Blame for the extremely bad relations which have developed between the U.S. and Cuba, and which alone enabled Premier Khrushchev to try his Cuban venture, can be laid as much to the U.S. as to Dr. Castro. When he first came to power Dr. Castro was not a Communist. Had the U.S. then dealt with him as they have dealt with other dictators, had they recognized the need within Cuba for revolutionary reform, however painful to U.S. interests, Cuba would now be in the U.S. and not the Soviet camp.

"There is no reason why Canada should not serve as a mediator. She could be commissioned by the OAS or the UN. The goal of the initial negotiations should be the gaining of Dr. Castro's consent for a committee of Canadians to visit Cuba and study the economic situation with a view to determining what sort of help is needed. This committee could hope to succeed only if it had the unofficial blessing of a United States that had decided to try a new attitude to Cuba. But the world has a right to expect that even the great and powerful U.S. will change its attitudes, when they have been wrong. Cuba's ailment cannot be cured in isolation, but only through contact. It is time that the treatment was begun."

—Toronto Globe and Mail (abridged) Dec. 27.

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was friendly. He told me he was a *campesino*, that he had gone through only five grades of school at the time of the revolution and he waxed eloquent on its benefits though much of his Spanish I could not understand. As we were standing outside the station talking, a newsboy came along with the paper *Hoy*, organ of the Cuban Communist Party. He bought me a copy and we settled down to read a document not to be found in Communist papers anywhere else in the Soviet world except Albania and North Korea and perhaps North Vietnam—a partial text several columns long as distributed by the Chinese News Agency of the editorial, "Proletarians of All Countries, Unite in Order to Fight Against Our Common Enemy" with which the People's Daily of Peking Dec. 15 had replied to Khrushchev's defense a few days earlier of his policy on Cuba*

In Which I Quote Fidel to My Guards

At 6 a.m. my *campesino* friend went out and returned with two long loaves of bread and a large can of coffee. The two guards settled down to their breakfast and waved me to join them. I was allowed to wash up in the lavatory behind the police barracks which seemed to be full of police sleeping in bunks piled three tiers high. The guards broke off huge slabs of bread which we dunked in small cans of coffee. The bread and coffee tasted good and I settled down afterward to sleep in a swivel chair. But when I awoke and saw it was past nine o'clock and there was no sign of a hearing officer I began to get restless. When a new shift of guards came on and I heard my case being discussed with the night shift, I renewed my efforts at a phone call. In my rudimentary Spanish, using the fingers of one hand to make my point, I said there were probably three or four *periodistas* (newspapermen) in the U.S. still friendly to the Cuban revolution, that I was one of them, that I had brought scarce medicines as a present to Cuba, and that here I was being held a prisoner. I said Che Guevara, Roa, Dorticos and other top leaders knew me and all they had to do was telephone to check my identity. "Look," I said, as a clincher, "Didn't Fidel himself in a recent speech attack *bureaucracia* and isn't this an example of bureaucracy at work?" My words seemed to make an impression on one of the new guards. He went off down the street—to make a phone call, I hoped. In the meantime, when ten o'clock came with no action, I thought I had better raise a tantrum. I began kicking chairs around the police station and demanding that someone who spoke English be summoned. This brought angry and sleepy guards pouring out of the barracks and finally I was taken inside, and a policeman awakened who spoke English.

There was a furious torrent of Spanish from the guard to the policeman who spoke English, and then I had an unpleasant surprise. At intervals, through the night, when I tried to make a phone call, I was assured that an immigration officer would be there at 9 o'clock, and it was implied that then my difficulties would be over. But now I was informed by the English speaking policeman that nothing could be done for me because it was not an immigration matter at all, but was in the hands of the security police. With this, as if to dramatize the hopelessness of further discussion, he turned over in his bunk and went back to sleep again.

I Feared A Czech-Style Frameup

It had been a comfort to remember, during the night, that Prof. Samuel Shapiro told me before I left the States that he had twice been arrested in Cuba, once on arrival, again on departure, for incautious remarks at the airport. But with the news that the security police were in charge of my case, I began to feel real alarm. I suddenly remembered the fate of my good friend, Mordecai Oren. An Israeli Left Zionist newspaperman, he had been arrested by the Czechs on a visit to Prague and framed for espionage in connection with the Slansky affair and imprisoned for four years. I recalled that when I met him at the Belgrade conference in September, 1961, he told me of the methods used to extract a false confession from him. He had given me a copy of the book, as translated from the Hebrew and published in France under Jean-Paul Sartre's aegis (M. Oren: *Prisonnier Politique a Prague;* Les Temps Modernes: Juilliard, 1960) in which he told the story. I wondered whether a similar fate might be in store for me. I had said to my wife on leaving in high spirits that if I were locked up in Cuba she was to send me oatmeal cookies. Now it looked as if this might turn out to be a prophetic joke!

I decided I had better calm down and rest up for a possible ordeal. I came out of the police dormitory and stretched out on two chairs in the rear of the police station to get some sleep. My audience was a ragged collection of two dozen

(Continued on Page Four)

*** I was later to find that the Cuban papers of Dec. 13 and 14 had published in two installments the full text of the Khrushchev report to the Supreme Soviet of Dec. 12. The issue of Hoy in which I read the partial text as cabled from Peking was that of Sunday, Dec. 16. Revolucion, organ of Fidel's July 26 Movement, is not published on Sunday. Its Monday, Dec. 17 issue carried the full text of the Peking declaration, covering more than a full page. Thus the Castro regime supplied the Cuban public impartially with the full text of what both sides in the Soviet world, the Russian and the Chinese, had said in their bitter dispute over Cuba, thermonuclear war and policy toward the U.S.**

The Kind of "Liberation" Our CIA's "Freedom Fighters" Had Planned For Cuba

"A few days before President Kennedy's inauguration, the CIA moved to strengthen its hold over Guatemala—in effect presenting his new Administration with a fait accompli in which the liberal elements among the Cuban exiles were swept from positions of influence. . . .

"While the [Cuban Revolutionary] Front's leadership, except for [Capt. Michael] Artime, was not consulted about the purge, the CIA came to rely extensively in its political activities on a shadowy group known around Miami as the 'Cuban CIA.' . . . The exclusion of politically 'unsound' fighters and favoritism for the pro-Batista groups continued even after President Kennedy had publicly assured that there would be no Batistianos among the Cuban freedom fighters. . . .

"But even the pre-invasion purges were not enough, apparently, for the CIA operatives and their Cuban business and political friends. There was still one more arrangement in the dark to assure that a post-Castro regime contained no trouble-makers. This top secret project was known as 'Operation Forty', and was set in motion in early March by [Joaquin] Sanjenis and the intelligence branch of the Front.

"Curiously, the 'liberators' were planning to repeat the policy of 'Che' Guevara when he swept down into the plains of central Cuba and left his political indoctrinators in every town and village in his path. The difference is that Guevara planted procommunists, and the 'Cuban CIA' was going to plant what at best can be called unreconstructed anti-revolutionaries. As 'Operation Forty' was being organized, it is worth remarking, the Kennedy Administration was eloquently affirming its support for a noncommunist but advanced social revolution in Cuba.

"According to well-informed Cubans, 'Operation Forty' also had a second task: that of assassinating, if necessary, political leaders who stood in the way. It was reported that the project included a hand-picked task force of professional killers who were to eliminate obdurate elements which might object to a return to the good old days."

—The Cuban Invasion: The Chronicle of A Disaster, by Tad Szulc and Karl E. Meyer, Ballantine Books, 1962.

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The Vagaries of the Secret Police As Inscrutable as the Weather

(Continued from Page Three)

juvenile delinquents picked up off the streets and locked up for the night. They had poured out of their cells for breakfast during my tantrum and now their chatter ceased and they looked on in wonder at this unexpected diversion with their bread and coffee. I shut my eyes and tried to sleep. The thought crossed my mind that if I were to have a prolonged stay in a Cuban jail, I could grow a beard and emerge a *barbudo*. I must have slept a short while. When I opened my eyes again, there in the doorway of the police station was the guard who had seemed to be impressed with my story, and had gone off—I hoped, to make a phone call. He signalled with one hand, the five fingers outstretched, and formed "cinco minutos" with his lips. It sounded as if he had indeed gotten help for me. I closed my eyes again. Then I heard a typewriter. Within a few minutes I was given a one page document in quintuplicate for signature. I could see that it was a release but I refused on principle to sign until it had been translated into English. Now the guards seemed to be anxious to get rid of me as soon as possible. They awakened the same English-speaking policeman in the barracks and brought him out immediately. It was an unconditional release which involved no concessions on my part, though there was still no explanation of why I had been detained in the first place. I signed all five copies, took one for myself and asked that a taxi be summoned. My anonymous friend among the guards found one for me. He and a plainclothesman helped me with my bags. They had not been searched or examined again. I shook hands warmly with the guard I suspected of having made a phone call for me and thanked him again. I was free. It was almost noon on a warm sunny Sunday in Havana.

I Make My Own Great Leap Forward

Finding a hotel was a problem. No reservations had been made for me. All the hotels I phoned seemed to be jammed. I managed to reach an old friend in the Cuban Foreign Ministry. He arranged to meet me at the Havana Riviera, and apologized profusely for my detention but he was as mystified as I was as to why I had been held. I had the feeling that in Cuba the vagaries of the secret police were accepted as one might elsewhere the vagaries of the weather. To make up for what happened he got me a room at the Havana Riviera. This huge luxury hotel, built by a Las Vegas group I believe, is now a Foreign Ministry hostel for visiting VIP's. The bedroom assigned me was palatial. Its huge mirror windows looked out on a baby blue sea and the great curve of the *Malecon*. The place was spotless, the only sign of the revolution being an ashtray on which was imprinted an appeal to the proletariat to unite. I had made it from jail to gilded palace, as the Chinese might say, in one great leap forward.

I had a shave and a hot bath and a short nap and then set forth, as befit a loyal American, to celebrate my freedom with a nostalgic pilgrimage to Sloppy Joe's, the bar which was for so many years the Mecca of thirsty or lonesome fellow American tourists. Strangely enough the cab driver —and this itself struck me as a sign of how times have changed—had never heard of Sloppy Joe's! I directed him to go to the Prado. There I got out. I walked past the familiar but now boarded up curio shops and the equally familiar but still open bars like Dirty Dick's, and there, miraculously, was Sloppy Joe's, open too and still in business. I felt as if I were on *terra firma* at last. There were only six patrons—two of them shooting dice—at the long mahogany bar, probably one of the world's longest. The walls were still lined with pictures of American celebrities taken on past visits to Havana—bygone worthies from a bygone past, from Joe Lewis to Joan Blondell and Willie Pep to Carole Landis. I ordered a Daiquiri, which cost only 90 cents and was first rate. Despite Marxism-Leninism, Cuba's Daiquiris remain the world's best. The bartender observed me discreetly but curiously. "You English?" he asked. "No," I said, "American." He looked at me warily, as if I were a phantom. "Any other Americans here?" I asked him. "No," said the bartender, "in Cuba, Americans *feeneesh*." He said it with a sweeping gesture, neither sadly nor triumphantly but objectively and with finality, as of an unalterable fact. I felt like the last Yankee Imperialist, unwelcome and no longer at home.

The Real Post-Cuba Challenge

"Twice—in the 1961 Berlin crisis and in this year's Cuba crisis—President Kennedy has rallied the nation for a firm stand, at the risk of nuclear war if necessary, against any forcible change in the power relations between the Soviet Union and the U.S. He was of course thoroughly right in doing so. But it is equally important that having resisted forcible change in the military balance, he should rally the nation behind a sustained effort for peaceful diplomatic changes that will reduce the dangers of nuclear conflict. Defending the status quo is not enough; being willing to risk war in a crisis is not enough."

—St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

Next Week: Cuba Looks Very Different From Within Than Without

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